Feminist Thought: Implications for Consumer Research

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This article applies three distinct feminist perspectives to critique scientific objectivity, and the problematics, theories, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis in consumer research. Each feminist perspective helps heighten sensitivity to gender biases in current research and offers insights on new directions for consumer scholarship.

The premise of this article is that consumer research, like other bodies of knowledge, has sometimes misrepresented women. More fundamentally, we will argue that a portion of consumer research's theory and knowledge are gendered in unrecognized ways, and that feminist critique is required to clarify the implicit assumptions. Such critiques have been directed at many other disciplines and exposed pervasive, systemic assumptions about women and about gender that reflect ungrounded stereotypes and beliefs (Calás and Smircich 1992; Langland and Gove 1981). Feminist reappraisals typically strive to raise the consciousness of members of the academy—female and male—to the pervasively gendered nature of their disciplines. They also seek to offer insights on how scientific practice and thought can be enhanced, not merely by "adding women" to existing theory and research, but also by identifying alternatives to current practice and thought based on feminist perspectives. This article strives to lay the groundwork for a parallel reappraisal, revision, and enrichment of consumer research by examining it in the light of feminist thought.

In suggesting that consumer research will benefit from feminist reappraisal and revision, we are neither implying nor presuming conscious sexist motivations on the part of specific individuals. To the contrary, we contend that, precisely because gender biases and gendered assumptions are long-standing, pervasive, and subtle aspects of our worldviews and research traditions, they are widely and unconsciously taken for granted. Thus, they are also very difficult to identify and revise. We wish to state clearly that we are not suggesting that the corrective is to dismiss science and our existing knowledge base. We propose that this knowledge base can be revised once researchers acquire a heightened sensitivity to the gendered nature of our discipline.

While some initial efforts have been made to bring certain feminist perspectives to bear on some aspects of consumer research,[1] no integrated effort that draws on the range of feminist thought has yet appeared. This article attempts to provide a more comprehensive basis for heightening sensitivity to gender biases and gendered assumptions in consumer research by first summarizing some major strands of feminist thought. It then draws on these feminist perspectives to illustrate the types of biases and assumptions rooted in dominant conceptions of science, as well as in the problematics—decisions about what aspects of the world need explaining (Harding 1986)—theory, and methods of data collection and analysis common in consumer research. Our goal is to be both critical and constructive: we seek to develop practical approaches to broadening and enriching consumer research.

AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

While feminist writings can be traced back to at least the seventeenth century, most feminist thinking has developed fairly recently. No single feminist perspective now dominates; rather, many viewpoints, some quite incommensurable, have been developed and exist simultaneously (Black 1989; Hirsch and Keller 1990;

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[1]Although the field of consumer research is clearly broader, in this article the term refers primarily to research appearing in outlets such as the *Journal of Consumer Research,* marketing journals, and conferences sponsored by the Association for Consumer Research.

TABLE 1

AN OVERVIEW AND COMPARISON OF MAJOR FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

Features	Liberal feminism	Women's voice/experience feminism	Poststructuralist feminism
Intellectual underpinnings	Liberal political philosophy	Marxism, psychoanalysis	Deconstructionism, postmodernism
Assumptions about human experience	Experience gives direct access to (the same) objective knowledge for women and men	The experiences, and therefore the knowledge, of women and men differ systematically	All experiences are mediated by dominant discourses; all knowledge is therefore constituted by language and potentially open to revision
Assumptions about sex and gender	Men and women are not different in their rationality; any observed differences are due to differences in socialization or access to opportunities and are open to change if men and women gain equal opportunities	Fundamental differences in nature and perspective are linked to sex and/or gender; these differences stem from either biology or socialization or both; while sex differences are influential, psychological gender is not fully determined by biological sex	A bipolar opposition between the terms related to men/masculinity vs. women/femininity is pervasive in dominant discourses; this filters the experiences of both men and women such that they take for granted assumptions about sex and gender differences; these assumptions can be challenged by deconstructions of dominant discourses
Strategies and goals for change	Enact and enforce legislation to ensure women have equal access to opportunities; strive to eliminate all sex-related differences in day-to-day behaviors, i.e., pursue androgyny	Demonstrate that female and/or feminine nature and perspectives are not inferior; pursue a state in which different sexes/genders are equally valued and empowered	Challenge the hegemony of dominant discourses that systematically disenfranchise women and other marginalized groups; seek to develop a heightened openness in society to multiple equally valued perspectives

Jagger 1983; Tong 1989). We do not wish to obscure the differences that exist among perspectives. Thus, we have chosen to summarize a range representative of the breadth of feminist thought. Recognizing that no review can be exhaustive of all feminist viewpoints, we have selected only three of the major ones. Like all categorical schemes, however, ours may be challenged for grouping distinct ideas, for failing to group logically linked ideas, or for failing to include important elements. We provide below an overview of three perspectives (see Table 1), liberal feminism, women's voice/experience feminism (Calás and Smircich 1992), and poststructural feminism, which offer a complementary range of critiques on consumer research.

Before discussing these perspectives, distinctions among three key terms need to be drawn. First, *sex* is a biological concept that allows us to distinguish between males and females purely on the basis of physiological characteristics. While biological sex per se does not predetermine behavior, it has a profound influence on a person's socialization experience (Fischer and Arnold 1990). Second, *gender* is a social concept referring to psychologically, sociologically, or culturally rooted traits, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral tendencies. Because gender is a pervasive filter through which individuals experience their social world, consumption activities are fundamentally gendered. Although the concepts of sex and gender are related, gender is not fully determined by sex. For instance, not all women are feminine and not all men are masculine (Bem 1974). Considerable gender variation has been detected between *and* among women and men. Third, although (as discussed below) feminist perspectives differ widely, it is commonly agreed that a feminist is one who believes there are inequities in contemporary society that disadvantage women relative to men and who supports the goal of eradicating these inequities. Feminism, like gender, is not isomorphic with sex. Being a woman is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being a feminist: many men adopt a feminist perspective; many women do not.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is rooted in liberal political philosophy, which encompasses basic beliefs in the equality of all beings and views human beings as essentially rational, self-interest-seeking agents (Jagger 1983; Tong 1989). Rationality is assumed to be a purely mental capacity and is regarded as what is especially valuable about human beings (Jagger 1983). Individual psychological differences resulting from differences in social opportunities are acknowledged, but rationality, the human essence, is viewed as a capacity for which every human being has the same potential.

Liberalism stresses the ultimate value of individuals and holds that individual rights have priority over general community welfare; it views the just society as one

that allows individuals to exercise their autonomy and to fulfill themselves (Tong 1989). Because the resources that allow self-fulfillment are believed to be limited in every society, the fundamental problem for liberalism is to devise social institutions that protect individuals' rights to a fair share of those resources while guaranteeing maximum freedom from state intervention for each (Jagger 1983). While classical liberals believed that allowing a free market to operate while guarding civil liberties would provide everyone with an equal opportunity to determine her or his own fate within the market, contemporary liberals tend to believe that individuals come to the market with such differences in initial advantage, talent, and luck that some of them cannot take their fair share of market opportunities without adjustments via government intervention (Tong 1989).

At present, liberal feminists feel that liberal principles are not applied equally to men and women. Men have tended to be treated as the "self" whose "self-interests" are to be protected. Women have tended to be treated as the "other"; as such, their interests were largely ignored or violated. The goal of liberal feminism is the application of liberal principles to women *and* men and a resultant sexual equality (Eisenstein 1986). Liberal feminists tend to hold the contemporary view that state intervention is required to achieve this goal since women have less frequently realized their full rational capabilities because they were deprived of essential opportunities such as education (Jagger 1983; Wendell 1987). They advocate eliminating laws that establish different rights for men and women, promoting legislation that prohibits various kinds of discrimination against women, undertaking major economic reorganization, and redistributing wealth (Jagger 1983; Tong 1989; Wendell 1987). Liberal feminists stress that opportunities for paid employment for women are particularly important in order to overcome the more insidious factors that keep women from full rational development (Tong 1989). The allocation of most domestic work and child care to women diminishes their opportunities for well-paying and/or prestigious jobs that would enhance their autonomy and self-fulfillment.

Liberal feminists argue that any detected psychological male/female differences are not innate but develop out of women's socially allocated roles, which discourage women from developing their full capacities for reason. They deny that the physical differences between men and women are relevant since they view rationality as having no physical basis. They argue that, as women gain access to equal opportunities through the necessary state interventions, women and men will actualize their potential rationality more equally and observed psychological differences will diminish or disappear, resulting in widespread psychological androgyny (Jagger 1983). Some contemporary liberal feminists specify that the ideal would be for individuals to possess a combination of masculine *and* feminine traits that would result if men took on some traditional female roles at the same time women gained access to traditional male roles (Tong 1989).

Liberal feminists are probably the most numerous today. Through the effort of contemporary and historical liberal feminists, improvements in legislation to protect women from many forms of discrimination have occurred. Liberal feminism is, however, most protective of the interests of white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists for whom preservation of many elements of the current sociopolitical status quo is acceptable (Jagger 1983; Tong 1989).[2] Other forms of feminism that represent more diverse perspectives and needs, and promote more radical agendas for sociopolitical change, flourish as well.

Women's Voice/Experience Feminism

This grouping includes a wide array of feminist perspectives grounded in diverse philosophical bases. These include, for instance, radical feminism and some versions of social and psychoanalytic feminism. What women's voice/experience perspectives have in common is a belief that there are differences between male and female experiences and that female experiences are at least an equally valid basis for developing knowledge and organizing society (Calás and Smircich 1991).[3] In contrast to liberal feminist thought, women's voice/women's experience feminism does not consider men and women to be essentially the same; among men and among women, shared experiences are assumed to help define a group-based rationality or mode of knowing. Further, feminists in this category tend to subscribe to the view that "distinctions of gender, based on sex, structure virtually every aspect of our lives and indeed

[2]In fact, minority women's viewpoints (from women of color, lesbian women, non-middle-class women, etc.) have often been completely ignored or distortionally represented by liberals and other relatively empowered feminists who view the interests of women too generally as monolithic and unified. Extensive discussions of minority issues in feminism can be found, e.g., in Barrett and McIntosh (1986), Childers and hooks (1990), hooks (1984), and King (1990).

[3]The profound differences in tenets and foci between the forms of feminism included in this category must not be misrepresented. For instance, radical feminists tend to focus on innate female/male differences (such as reproductive anatomy and roles) and to trace women's oppression to exploitation of these differences; they seek to alter the hierarchical ordering of male/female relationships based on these differences while preserving that which is uniquely, and innately, female. In contrast, many psychoanalytic feminists are concerned with differences in preconscious psychic development that stem from girls' and boys' identification with, versus differentiation from, their mothers; these psychoanalytic feminists believe that the development of psychologically healthy and empowered women and men requires alterations in the standard parenting arrangements. Most social feminists focus on neither physical nor psychic differences but on the social structures, particularly of patriarchy and capitalism, which constrain the roles into which men and women are socialized. They call for revisions in these social structures in order to open a wider range of roles for women and men, and to end the subordination of women to men on the basis of their traditional roles.

are so all-pervasive that ordinarily they go quite unrecognized" (Jagger 1983, p. 85).

Some feminists in this category believe that differences between men and women are primarily or largely innate and linked to biology (e.g., Brownmiller 1976; Daly 1978). They recognize that antifeminists have often used biological arguments to justify the oppression of women but feel that this interpretation of the implications of biological determinism is unwarranted. They focus on how innate differences in the physical strength of women and men have enabled men to unjustly oppress women. They also stress the unique biologically based (pro)creative capacities of women and suggest that this forms the basis of a distinctive female perspective. Such theories imply a direct link between biological sex and psychological gender.

Other feminists in this category reject biological determinism (e.g., Oakley 1981; Smith 1987). They believe in a "distinctive standpoint for women, not necessarily as a general attribute of women as a class of persons, but as a mode of experience that is distinctive to women and in important ways an experience that has marked [women] off from men and still continues to do so. This is an experience of work around particular individuals, particularly children" (Smith 1989, p. 34). Feminists in this group view gender as a socially constructed category but believe that the deep embeddedness of the construct leads to real differences in the life-worlds of most women versus those of most men.

A central concern of feminists in this category is to eradicate the subordination of women by validating that which is associated with femaleness. Androgyny is generally not considered an ideal that will help to achieve this goal. Many suggest that blending masculinity and femininity is as absurd as putting "master and slave language or imagery together to define a free person" (Raymond 1979, p. 161). Some feminists in this group would argue that the ideal to strive for is some form of matriarchy ranging from a society based on matriarchal values to one ruled by women, which privileges women's voices and ways of knowing (Jagger 1983). Others believe a preferable state can be achieved by developing alternate social arrangements (such as organizations run by and for women) that create an environment where women's voices and experiences are fully valued. Most would argue that, at a minimum, it is essential to recognize the ways in which knowledge is gendered and to gain legitimacy for that feminine knowledge that has been suppressed or marginalized. Feminist theorists in this group have begun to identify numerous theories and practices that have been male gendered and to articulate female alternatives (Belenky et al. 1986; Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982). For instance, definitions of moral development and of what constitutes moral behavior have been argued to be male biased (Gilligan 1982). Gilligan argues that traditional notions of morality are based on the masculine tendency to assume a sharp distinction between the self and the *other; feminine notions of morality differ because they* are informed by women's tendencies to regard the boundaries between self and other as fluid and undefined.

Poststructuralist Feminism

Also known as postmodernist feminism or postfeminism, poststructuralist feminism is most recent in vintage.[4] It is rooted in the multifaceted postmodernist movement developed in and from the works of Derrida (1973), Foucault (1979, 1981, 1986), and others. While these works vary considerably, they share certain assumptions about language, subjectivity, and discourse. Language is viewed as the forum where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely consequences are defined and contested. It is through language that meaning is constituted: for instance, the meanings of "femininity" and "masculinity" and of "self" and "other" vary from language to language, as well as among discourses within a language.

Given that language works in this way, it is regarded as the medium in which our subjectivity (our sense of ourselves and of situations) is constructed. Thus, an individual's subjectivity is not viewed as fixed or coherent, and the idea that knowledge can be validated by experience is seriously questioned. (Such a view contrasts with liberal feminism, which assumes that every human being possesses a unified rational consciousness, and with women's voice/experience feminism, which assumes women share a common experience base.) Poststructuralism views subjectivity as contradictory and open to constitution or reconstitution, through discourse, each time we think or speak.

The term "discourse" refers to the historical, social, and political aspect of language and hence of subjectivity. The meanings of social reality that shape the way individuals interpret their lived world, including the meanings they have for "femininity" and "masculinity," vary among discourses within a language. For instance, the term "politically correct" is now being pejoratively associated, by certain powerful voices, with refusals to condone speech or action that is discriminatory; social activists might label such refusals in a positive way as ethically appropriate. Variations among discourses are socially and historically situated, and political; particular discourses support particular social structures and processes embodied in institutions such as the law, the educational system and the family. Each institution has a discursive field, or set of competing discourses, that are a site of struggle for meaning and power. The power structures that prevail depend on which discourses are dominant. Thus, if the pejorative term "politically correct" continues to be applied prevalently to nondiscriminatory practices, groups who benefit from such discrimination are likely to maintain

[4]This section draws extensively on Weedon (1987).

or gain power and institutions are unlikely to be challenged to eliminate discriminatory practices.

Poststructural feminism draws on the notions of language, subjectivity, and discourse to understand existing power relations that disadvantage women and to identify opportunities and strategies for change. For instance, poststructural feminists could note the current condemnation of "political correctness" and argue that this rhetoric supports patriarchy since it undermines attempts to discourage sexist language and behaviors. The method for identifying opportunities and strategies for change relies on historical analysis of discourses that structure institutions and modes of thought, deconstructing binary oppositions (such as "feminine" vs. "masculine" or "self" vs. "other") in language, and seeking to recognize the power hierarchies supported by particular discourses. Poststructuralist feminist analyses, which are challenging certain institutional discourses and practices, are only beginning to emerge (see Calás and Smircich 1991; Firat 1991; Mumby and Putnam 1990; Scott 1990).

It should be noted that, while poststructural feminists view other feminists as ineffective to the extent that they fail to deconstruct dominant discourses, some feminists of other perspectives would argue that poststructuralism is not well suited to feminist critique since it is antifoundational and hence apolitical. Any poststructuralist critique could in turn be deconstructed; for instance, a poststructuralist feminist analysis of criticisms of political correctness could in turn be deconstructed. Feminists from other perspectives have rejected poststructuralism both because it has this potential to undermine its own critique (and thus its own political agenda) and because many thinkers associated with poststructuralism have been unconcerned with, or even opposed to the aims of, feminism and have perpetuated the privileging of nonfeminist interests. Hekman (1991) insists these concerns are serious but argues that poststructuralism can usefully be conjoined with feminism. She notes that engaging poststructuralism reveals to feminists the futility of any attempt they might make to define an essentialist feminine nature or to replace masculine epistemology with feminine epistemology. She argues that poststructuralism shows feminists both the necessity and the political power inherent in rejecting masculine/feminine dualisms and the worldview that hierarchically orders these categories. Poststructural feminism thus advances the goal of challenging the patriarchal status quo by pointing up the arbitrary nature of the assumptions on which it is based.

FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF CONSUMER RESEARCH

Each of the feminist perspectives discussed above provides distinct grounds for critically assessing various aspects of consumer research. While elements of some of these critiques could be raised equally well from other perspectives (such as Anderson's [1986] critical relativism), it is unlikely that critics speaking from nonfeminist perspectives will fully develop those aspects of their thought relevant to feminists. Just as it can be argued that no research is value neutral, so it must be recognized that no critique is value neutral; those who do not consciously reflect feminist values will be unlikely to devote attention to the feminist implications of their work. It is, therefore, necessary to review some criticisms that have been raised previously in the consumer behavior literature in order to address those facets of the criticisms with particular relevance to a feminist agenda.

Objectivity

The ideal of scientific objectivity has been insightfully critiqued by other consumer research scholars (e.g., Anderson 1983, 1986; Peter and Olson 1983). Contributing to the philosophy of science debates during the last decade, they argue that no science is objective and what counts as valid knowledge is relative to programmatic standards and commitments. These views are no longer considered heretical. Even among conservative scholars, the possibility that scientific objectivity cannot be absolute has been conceded (Hunt 1990). Feminist critiques of objectivity are nonetheless worth discussing since they help us to see commonly overlooked androcentric research assumptions.

Liberal Feminism. The mildest critique comes from liberal feminism, which accepts contemporary notions of objectivity (such as sophisticated falsificationism [Calder and Tybout 1987]). Liberal feminism suggests that lapses in objectivity reflect a correctable failure to rigorously adhere to proper scientific procedure (Harding 1987). For instance, liberal feminists would argue that early consumer research that assessed the relative influence of female versus male spouses in purchase decisions was nonobjective simply because improper research techniques were used. Specifically, only one partner, usually the wife, was questioned about both her influence and that of her spouse, and no account was taken of the fact that self- versus spouse-reported levels of influence often vary greatly. This measurement problem forestalled understanding of variations in family decision-making patterns (Davis 1971). Stronger concerns about objectivity in science are raised by both women's voice/experience feminism and poststructural feminism.

Women's Voice/Experience Feminism. Women's voice/experience versions of feminism assume that the differences between men and women result in incommensurable experiences and points of view. These views offer critiques of objectivity that fall into two categories. The first critique is raised by those feminists who believe that female/male differences are biologically based and

unbridgeable. They tend to reject "objectivity" altogether as a male value (e.g., Daly 1978). In the extreme, such feminists would accept that in the following pairs of bipolar terms, the former truly more aptly characterizes men and the latter more aptly characterizes women: cultured versus natural, public versus private, scientific versus artistic, rational versus emotional, thinking versus feeling, hard versus soft, quantitative versus qualitative, and objective versus subjective. If these dualistic cultural gender stereotypes are regarded as true, it follows that the standard of objectivity is a male standard and that women are alienated from any science—including consumer research—that embraces this standard.

The second critique is raised by those who believe male/female differences are socially based. The historical association of objectivity with men and subjectivity with women (Fee 1983; Jordanova 1980) leads to concerns about the assumption that women can be objects but not subjects of knowledge, known but not knowers (Keller 1978; Oakley 1981; Smith 1974; Westkott 1979). Further, this association equates scientific activity with masculine characteristics, thus implying that a woman scientist can only be a subject, and a knower, by adopting a male perspective. However, many women have found themselves enmeshed in conflict over the relation of their respective disciplines to their personal experiences because they feel that to practice research from a male perspective compels them to discard or repress their experienced world as a valid source of information (Simeone 1987; Smith 1974).

However, the implication here is not that women are ill suited to research or defective because they cannot maintain the subject/object separation. The ability of anyone to maintain subject/object separation has already been severely questioned by postpositivists (e.g., Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988; Hirschman 1986). Rather, the implication is that, since historically men have largely been the sole proprietors of knowledge (in that they alone were likely to receive higher education and enter into the "knowledge creating" professions) and since objectivity is socially perceived as a valued masculine trait, it is easy to see how the perception of an objective, unbiased, and ungendered perspective could be created and perpetuated (Keller 1978, 1982). But, as these critiques suggest, scientific objectivity is not achieved at times because male (or white or socially privileged) scientists do not study some matters as female (or nonwhite or socially disadvantaged) scientists might pursue them. Since male experiences and resultant viewpoints are fundamentally different, men have difficulty asking objective questions or developing objective theories about subjects related to *others'* experiences. This difficulty is not due to disinterest in others' experiences. Harding (1986) argues that socialized differences in men's and women's roles not only structure understanding, they set limits on understanding. The perspective of someone in a given role (male vs. female, white vs. Black vs. Hispanic vs. Asian, upper vs. lower class) is thus inherently partial in both senses of the word.

The concerns of women's voice/experience feminism can be applied to objectivity in consumer research. For instance, it is consistent with this feminist perspective to argue that the predominantly middle-class white male scholarly community has persistently studied the consumption of labor-saving durables in a way that reveals a severe breach of understanding of female consumers and of families who do not conform to the North American prototype (i.e., a married woman and man with one or more children). As women entered the full-time paid work force outside the home in greater numbers, consumer researchers searched for a connection between family expenditure on time-saving durables and whether the wife had paid employment outside the home (Reilly 1982; Schaninger and Allen 1981; Strober and Weinberg 1977, 1980; Weinberg and Winer 1983) based on an economic metaphor likening the household to a factory. The rationale offered for investigating this connection is either that the family will need to save time on domestic duties if the wife is working fewer hours in the home (see Weinberg and Winer 1983) or that wives' earnings are regarded as transitory and therefore durables are purchased as a form of savings (Mincer 1960). The consistent finding has been, contrary to these economic arguments, that families in which the wife works outside the home do not differ in their expenditure on time-saving durables from those families in which the wife does not have outside paid employment (holding constant the total family income). Several concerns about this research stream's objectivity are highlighted by feminist critiques.

The very posing of the question reflects traditional assumptions about the relative valuation of women's work, the sex of the "main bread winner" in mixed-sex couples, and the structure of contemporary families. Specifically, it is assumed that women's paid employment is a "consumer behavior construct" (Schaninger and Allen 1981) whereas men's paid employment is to be taken for granted. Moreover, families are assumed to be headed by one employed male who is the main breadwinner and one woman who is not. In order to carry out these studies, researchers are forced to discard from public data sets the large portion of families in which this norm does not apply. Such studies would probably not be very meaningful in cultures and subcultures in which women's roles, family structures, and consumption patterns differ from the North American prototype. Thus, the objectivity of the manner in which questions concerning wife's role status and labor-saving durables consumption are posed must be questioned if only because the research question is relevant to such a select group (i.e., those who conform to the [decreasingly representative] prototypical family) but does not represent the growing numbers of "non-traditional" households (see Roberts and Wortzel 1984). Further,

the persistence with which a relationship between women's employment status and consumption of time-saving durables is sought, despite the "null results" findings of initial studies, suggests that researchers are less than objective in their beliefs regarding whether such a relationship should exist.

The objectivity with which findings are interpreted must also be called into question. For instance, one explanation of the finding that time-saving durables are not consumed more by families in which wives work outside the home is that families "do not treat wives' and husbands' earnings differently" (Weinberg and Winer 1983, p. 259). This explanation may not in itself be wrong (though Zelizer [1989] provides evidence that wives' and husbands' monies have been regarded as separate and unequal), but it appears to be partial (i.e., biased and incomplete). The perspective of the women in the families studied seems to be inaccessible to the researchers; the female subjects remain the "other." An equally plausible explanation for the "no difference" findings is that women employed outside the home feel compelled to serve their families in much the same manner they would if they were not employed; that is, they use no more—and no fewer—labor-saving devices than their counterparts who do not work outside the home since they are trying to fulfill their social role expectations by conforming to whatever the standards are for good wives and mothers despite having the role of breadwinner. If having labor-saving durables is considered consistent with the role, then we might expect a family who could afford such durables to purchase them, regardless of the wife's paid employment status. In fact, Firat and Lewis argue that "the advent of 'time-saving durables,' while presented in the public domain of ideas as emancipation of women from housework, in effect has expanded the social expectation of efficiency and has increased the physical and psychological pressures upon women" (1985, p. 228). The tendency toward the "social reproduction" (Chodorow 1978) of traditional gender roles is a factor deeply ingrained in the minds of contemporary consumers, but its impact is ignored in studies in this research stream.

Women's voice/experience critiques do not imply that the notion of objectivity should be dismissed as futile, but that it needs to be revised because of the "partiality" of individual knowledge. Keller (1982), for example, suggests reconceptualizing objectivity as a dialectical process involving critical self-reflection. In practice, the use of mixed-sex research teams sensitive to gender issues may help mitigate this partiality (e.g., Costa 1991; Easterday et al. 1977; Warren 1988; Young 1991), although no single man or woman can be expected to fully represent the masculine or feminine point of view. This implies that an extended interaction between "knowers" from various groups (e.g., men and women) is required to obtain more complete, more objective, less distorted knowledge. Without such interaction, female consumers will continue to be represented as the "other," that is, as someone different in kind from the researcher.

Poststructuralist Feminism. Poststructuralist feminist criticisms of objectivity are the most pervasive and least readily addressed. These critiques cast doubt on the possibility of objectivity since they deny that objective knowledge can be obtained through experience (Flax 1990; Weedon 1987). They argue that all knowledge derived through experience is socially constructed by historically, socially, and politically shaped discourses. Poststructuralists in general focus on the manner in which language serves to structure knowledge as it is perceived. Feminist poststructuralists pay particular attention to the way gender-related language pervasive in our culture shapes what is viewed as objective knowledge; they problematize "knowing" as an already (male) gendered sphere of action (Flax 1990). For instance, the language of consumer research includes several terms for female consumers, such as "house-wives," "work-wives," "just-a-job wives," "career women," and "super-women" (see, e.g., Bartos 1978, 1989; McCall 1977) but has no corresponding set of terms (e.g., career men) for male consumers. This terminology reflects vivid differences in our knowledge about female and male consumers. As objects of study in consumer research, women are frequently defined in terms of their marital roles. On the other hand, men's status is taken for granted, and their consumption behaviors are rarely singled out as interesting consumer phenomena.

Such examples from poststructural feminism reinforce the premise that all knowledge is open to revision since it is only apprehended through the categories that shape perceptions. This does not imply that knowledge can be corrected via intersubjective verification or critical reflection since everyone is socialized through some set of discourses and her or his knowledge is thus filtered. Rather, it implies that objective knowledge of reality is impossible and that knowledge claims tend to empower some and disadvantage others because they are shaped by dominant discourses.[5] Knowledge claims about women in consumer research largely have been generated within the dominant patriarchal discourse and reflect the taken-for-granted status of women as objects of investigation. These knowledge claims thus appear to convey "knowledge about" rather "knowledge of" female consumers (see Langer 1963) that entrenches the status of women as the "other" about whom knowledge must be sought (vs. the "self" who creates knowledge). Rather than seek truth via objectivity, poststructural feminism enjoins scholars to challenge seeming objectivity in extant thought in order to reveal patterns of domination (of women or other less powerful groups)

[5]Critics of general poststructuralism argue that it goes too far in rejecting the possibility of some shared knowledge and of some progress toward less biased understanding. In its extreme versions, poststructuralism is regarded as bordering on both nihilism and solipsism.

and clarify patriarchal interests that are sustained by specific scientific discourses.

Problematics

A discipline's cognitive aims and values both shape and limit its problematics (Laudan 1983). Problematics are decisions about what aspects of the world need explaining and what is puzzling about these aspects (Harding 1986). Consumer research problematics have been criticized for their alignment with marketer interests (see Holbrook 1987); alternative problematics might reflect consumer interests, political interests or nonapplied interests (i.e., interest for interest's sake; Belk 1986; Bristor 1985; Holbrook 1987). Similarly, the different feminist perspectives can suggest problematics that reflect concerns especially relevant to women consumers.

Liberal Feminism. Liberal feminism, which views individuals as rational agents in pursuit of self-interests, suggests that, so long as women are less likely to become scientists (e.g., as a result of inequities in the social and educational opportunities afforded to women), then their interests are less likely to be reflected in the questions that are pursued. An implicit assumption is that questions of interest to women tend not to be asked by male scientists simply because they are, rationally and inevitably, pursuing self-interests. For example, much research on family consumption arguably reflects the self-interests of married men who may wish to devote minimal time and effort to household production activities, regardless of whether their wives also work outside the home. Taking for granted that men will not take responsibility for major household production activities such as child care and food preparation, even when their wives work outside the home, Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis (1991) assume that household responsibilities that cannot be met by wives will be supplemented by purchases, not husbands' labor. The interests of women might be better served by research that both challenges this assumption about primary responsibility and seeks to identify ways in which husbands might be motivated to assume more equal responsibility. As another example, Choe, Yoon, and Johnson (1991) explored sex differences in durable-goods payment methods. Their data suggest that women heads of household (who were, by definition, all unmarried) in comparison to the men household heads (who were almost all married) were significantly worse off economically. The knowledge generated by the Choe et al. study might assist in the development of a durable-goods marketing strategy. An alternative problematic more relevant to the interests of many women is whether women heads of one-adult households, compared to their male counterparts, are economically disadvantaged or have fewer, more restrictive, payment options (and if so, why).

Liberal feminism stresses, however, that increases in the numbers of women in academe, or in the numbers of consumer researchers interested in "women's issues," do not ensure that feminist research will necessarily be undertaken or published. Researchers wishing to study consumer issues using feminist perspectives may face problems similar to those encountered by feminists in other fields. Feminist perspectives often do not fit accepted traditional paradigms, theories, and research methods (Smith 1974). Further, pursuing topics of interest to women is often viewed as lacking generality or academic value, and researchers who choose such topics are systematically less likely to obtain access to critical resources and, thus, less likely to receive tenure or promotions (see Simeone 1987; Spender 1981). The difficulties of obtaining outside funding faced generally by researchers affiliated with business schools (AMA Task Force 1988) may be more acute for feminist consumer researchers. As a main, albeit limited, source of outside funds for business school researchers, the Marketing Science Institute is explicitly dedicated to the study of management issues; women's issues were not listed in a recent statement of research priorities (Marketing Science Institute 1992). The kinds of alternative problematics suggested above to be reflective of the interests of many women consumers may not be viewed as relevant for advancing managerial marketing knowledge.

In fact, some research of interest to women could be antithetical to the interests of marketers. For instance, the interests of marketers and women may be at odds with regard to product proliferation in the household-cleaning-product category. Whereas marketers are interested in growing sales within the category by developing increasingly specialized products and suggesting ever-higher standards of cleanliness, women might be better served by studies of how to minimize housework by using fewer, generalized all-purpose cleaning products and how to resist any tendency to escalate standards of cleanliness (Friedan 1963). While exceptions certainly occur, it seems likely that obtaining funding to study a consumer topic of particular interest to women would be more difficult if the topic did not coincide with the interests of marketers.

Women's Voice/Experience Feminism. Feminism based on women's voice/experience can suggest additional consumer problematics that, because they arise from women's experiences, have been largely ignored. No exhaustive list of such topics is possible. However, the types of problematics indicated by women's voice/experience feminism can be illustrated by discussing one major example of distinctively female experience and tracing out some of its implications. A notable theorist who explored certain unique female experiences is Nancy Chodorow (1978). She argues that the early childhood of girls differs fundamentally from that of boys because women have been the primary early childhood caregivers. The fact that boys and girls experience the caregiving element of their environment differently, she suggests, accounts for the development

of basic sex differences in personality. Girls identify more with their mothers and develop more flexible ego boundaries. Boys are encouraged to differentiate themselves from their mothers and identify with their fathers, who are more remote during the child's early years, which Chodorow posits leads boys to identify with the "position" of the father rather than the actual person. Further, she suggests that differences between the positional identification boys experience and the personal identification girls experience is the definitive factor in the differential constitution of masculinity and femininity. Specifically, it makes women open to forming numerous deep, primary relationships while leaving men without an ability to form extended networks of deep personal relationships. Women develop the propensity to form and nurture relationships not only on their own behalf but also as part of their role in the domestic sphere.

Chodorow's argument that women are more "relationship focused" than men opens up some distinctive problematics for consumer research. Research questions to date have lacked much consideration of the relational aspects of consumption. When the role of the "other" in consumption is questioned, the stress has been either on how self-image is derived through others' view of our consumer behaviors (e.g., Solomon 1983) or on types of reference group influence on individual tastes and preferences and on susceptibility to influence (e.g., Bearden, Nettemeyer, and Teel 1989; Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975). Both approaches are characterized by inherently atomistic views of consumption that accord more closely with the masculine tendency toward individuation than with the feminine tendency toward relationship building (Gainer 1992). An alternative view of consumption is based on the notion that individuals' activities are a function of the social networks in which they are embedded (Granovetter 1985). Sensitivity to the importance of social relationships in consumption is evident in studies that focus on consumer's social networks (e.g., Brown and Reingen 1987; Frenzen and Davis 1990; Reingen et al. 1984), some of the work on gift giving (e.g., Belk and Coon 1991; Fischer and Arnold 1990), on holiday rituals (e.g., Wallendorf and Arnould 1991), and on the meaning of possessions (e.g., Belk 1988). As yet, however, little research in our discipline has directly explored the implications for consumer behavior of the importance (to women) of relationship building and maintenance. Research that acknowledges a "moral economy" (i.e., a system of transactions that are defined as socially desirable or "moral" because through them social ties are recognized and balanced social relationships are maintained) as opposed to the traditional exchange paradigm is needed to correct this imbalance. For instance, Cheal's (1988) study of gift exchanges among a community of Winnipeg residents explicitly explored how respondents created and maintained their social worlds partially through the yearly cycle of gift giving; his analysis reveals that his respondents did not participate in gift exchanges in order to receive valued goods but rather to affirm their kin and friend networks.

Such a relationship-based focus could be used to conceptualize new problems, such as how the relationship between consumers and organizations figures in the construction of consumers' social worlds. Agentic (masculine) perspectives on consumer-organization relationships have focused on how the marketing organization can use them to achieve business goals (Hirschman 1991). For instance, brand loyalty, the term used to describe a consumer's commitment to a brand or company, tends to be defined simply in terms of the repeat-buying patterns of individual consumers and studied strictly so as to enable marketers to maintain market share in the face of competition (Kotler and Turner 1989). In contrast, a communal perspective on consumer-organization relationships might focus on relationships that were not strictly a means to an end. For instance, loyal donors' relationships to one another and to a particular not-for-profit organization could usefully be studied so as to increase understanding of how shared goals bind consumers to one another and the organization and how the organizations are shaped by their relationships to their donor base (Gainer 1992). It is likely that a better understanding of the manner in which interpersonal relationships are created and sustained through consumer behaviors could be developed if our typical narrow focus on market-based exchanges were broadened and non-market-based transactions (e.g., "handing down" goods) were also studied. Though this discussion deals with the implications of but one idea about the differences between men and women, it illustrates the impact on consumer research problematics that the feminism of women's voice/experience might have.

Poststructuralist Feminism. While liberal and women's voice/experience feminisms contribute additional problems to study, or additional ways of studying existing problems, poststructural feminism can both deconstruct existing problematics and suggest new ones. Deconstructionism draws heavily on Derrida's (1973) antiessentialist analyses of language, which shows that no signifiers have a fixed signification and that the meaning of signifiers is always in flux. A feminist deconstruction of consumer research focuses on the gendered language in existing problematics and asks how gendered signifiers shape our view of existing problematics. For example, Hirschman's (1991) content analysis of current research published in the *Journal of Marketing* shows that marketers' relationships to consumers are almost always described in terms that portray marketers as agentic beings who seek to wield power over consumers rather than as communally oriented beings who seek to coexist in harmony with consumers. The most common agentic themes include gaining power and control over others; instrumentalism; competition;

and conflict, war, and aggression. This analysis can help us to challenge some of the patriarchal assumptions that inform our current problematics.

New problematics associated with a poststructuralist feminist approach, which recognizes the way gendered signifiers are associated with seemingly neutral things or ideas, are exemplified by the works of Forty (1986) and Heisley (1991). Forty (1986) shows that, in the nineteenth century, differential product designs (e.g., wristwatches) began to communicate socially constituted ideals of femininity and masculinity that were held to correspond to biological sex differences; his work illustrates how the interplay of gendered signifiers and that which they signify is an integral part of the dynamic between social norms, gender, and consumption styles. Heisley's (1991) work on the gender symbolism in food found the signifier "feminine" to be highly associated with unprocessed foods such as milk and eggs, and the signifier "masculine" to be highly associated with meat.

To summarize, although extant consumer research problematics represent a variety of different interests, especially those of managers, they are often informed by unacknowledged gendered assumptions. Feminist perspectives can be used to demonstrate that many seemingly gender-neutral or gender-inclusive problematics actually incorporate gender biases, such as formulating problems that serve male self-interests, overlooking problems that reflect women's unique experiences, and shaping problematics on the basis of masculine language and signifiers. Additionally, feminist perspectives can suggest new problematics that seek to remedy this imbalance by explicitly focusing on the female and the feminine.

Theories

While we have suggested many ways in which consumer research problematics might be broadened or challenged by feminist perspectives, it must be recognized that gendered problematics are difficult to recognize and correct because of the mutually reinforcing relationship between problems on one hand and theories and methods of data collection and analysis on the other (Bernard 1973). In other words, problems chosen for investigation are greatly limited by available theories and methods; theories and methods are used because they facilitate investigations of certain problems. This discussion will focus in particular on the theoretical perspectives on sex and gender that characterize or are absent from our literature.

Liberal Feminism. Although liberal feminism acknowledges biological differences, it does not theorize that they determine differences in rational abilities and processes. Thus, liberal feminism would call into question implicit assumptions that biological differences determine observed differences in cognitive style or capacity. For example, recent studies of the impact of various stimuli on men versus women are premised on the theory that males and females differ innately in their tendency to be agentic or communal and in their hemispheric information-processing styles (Meyers-Levy 1988, 1989; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). Using biological sex as an independent variable, the research design suggests an implicit belief that the cause of detected male/female differences is biologically "hard wired." A liberal feminist perspective would caution that different results might be found using subjects who had been raised under different social or cultural conditions that were more nearly equal for men and women. It suggests, at a minimum, that the interpretation of results in such studies should consider that detected sex-related differences in cognitive processing might not be stable across all social and cultural settings.

At the same time, liberal feminism would also question whether results from studies using single-sex samples lack validity for generalized consumer behavior knowledge. For instance, Reingen and his colleagues (Reingen et al. 1984; Ward and Reingen 1990) have sampled college sororities to investigate the role of interpersonal relationships in consumer decision making; Richins (1991) examined the effects of physically attractive ad models on young women's satisfaction with their own attractiveness; and MacInnis and Park (1991) studied the effects of music indexicality (the extent to which it arouses emotion-laden reactions) on young women's high- and low-involvement ad processing. While single-sex sample designs have certain advantages, they forgo the opportunity to empirically investigate whether phenomena are sex specific. Thus, generalizing knowledge claims about "consumers" from single-sex samples is theoretically indefensible without additional research involving the other sex.

To summarize, while liberal feminists reject the notion that cognitive abilities are biologically determined, they accept the premise that sex differences currently exist because of social inequities. So long as inequities exist, and particularly since so much of consumer behavior (who shops, who chooses, who pays, who consumes what) is demonstrably linked in some way to sex, liberal feminism would argue that sex differences should be investigated empirically. However, it should not be assumed that the cause of these differences is biological.

Women's Voice/Experience Feminism. Women's voice/experience feminism stresses that theories should take into account experientially based differences in the viewpoints of men and women. The use of gender-related constructs provides one means of doing so. For instance, two psychological constructs commonly used in consumer research acknowledge that individuals are variably socialized into gendered perspectives. One is gender identity, that is, the extent to which women and men identify with both masculine and feminine traits (e.g., Allison et al. 1980; Gentry and Doering 1977; Gentry, Doering, and O'Brien 1978; Gentry and Haley

1984; Golden, Allison, and Clee 1979; Stern 1988). The other construct is gender role attitudes, that is, the extent to which individuals have traditional views about the rights and responsibilities of women and men (e.g., Fischer and Arnold 1990; Green and Cunningham 1975; Qualls 1987; Schaninger and Buss 1985).

Women's voice/experience feminism helps us see two types of problems that may characterize some consumer theory that does not incorporate gender explicitly. The first concerns theories and concepts that disregard gender but contain gender-based asymmetries. For example, some constructs contain asymmetric gender referents based on men's experiences as the norm. The construct "working wives" (cf. Soberon-Ferrer and Dardis 1991) makes sense only if one regards childcare and household management as nonwork or leisure and defines work only as paid employment outside the home. From a male perspective, it may be easy to differentiate housework from "real" work because housework is paid for with emotional, not economic, currency. However, from a female perspective housework compares badly to most paid employment—it is boring, physically demanding, never ending (Forty 1986) and is not recognized as a legitimate occupation. Gender bias in the perception of meaningful work may help explain why Bartos (1989) concluded that the search for behavioral differences among women based solely on their occupational status has proved unsatisfactory. This is not to say that all constructs must be gender symmetric or inclusive. Recognizing asymmetries would help us appreciate the scope and/or limitations of our concepts and might suggest the need for new ones. For example, Belk (1988) very appropriately acknowledges his concept of the extended self to be inherently masculine and Western, thereby raising the possibility that feminine or Eastern constructs might be sought.

The second problem concerns research that ignores gender as a theoretical variable on the assumption that it is irrelevant to the matter of interest. This assumption pervades much of the theory in which consumer research is rooted yet is undermined by recent findings that the differential socialization of boys and girls relates to many adult behaviors (e.g., Chodorow 1978; Dinnerstein 1976; Gilligan 1982). One implication of this point applies to studies in which gender is ignored at a theoretical level, yet significant male/female differences are empirically detected. For instance, Feick and Price (1987) find sex differences in consumers' propensity to provide shopping and marketplace information. Since shopping is socially stereotyped as "women's work," theoretical attention to the role of gender-related socialization differences might help explain observed sex differences in the market maven construct.

A second implication is that a consideration of gender at the theoretical level might shed light on empirical problems seemingly unrelated to gender. For example, emotion has been the topic of several recent articles (e.g., Hui and Bateson 1991; MacInnis and Park 1991; Olney, Holbrook, and Batra 1991; Westbrook and Oliver 1991). This is encouraging since consumer researchers have historically preferred to study rational, logical consumer processes associated with the masculine, such as information processing, over processes associated with the feminine, such as emotion (Holbrook 1990). However, the emerging body of knowledge about emotion may be distorted by overlooking gender as an explicit theoretical issue. For instance, in linking emotion to satisfaction with a recent car purchase, Westbrook and Oliver (1991) clustered their largely male (74 percent) sample into groups representing different emotional patterns. They were puzzled because the "unemotional" group (which contained the largest number of respondents) was related to "moderately high" satisfaction levels. Although the number of men and women in each group was not reported, gender may shed some theoretical light: since men tend to be socialized to hide their emotions, gender may moderate the relationship between expressed emotion and satisfaction. Incorporating gender theories into future research on emotion and/or customer satisfaction might yield a better understanding of such phenomena.

Awareness of the different ways feminists theorize gender may help consumer researchers to articulate their own theoretical positions more clearly. It may also help them to choose which theories to apply more knowledgeably; there is a tendency to assume certain constructs are relevant to certain consumer behaviors without exploring or explaining the rationale for such suppositions. For instance, in their research into gender differences in durable-goods payment methods, Choe et al. (1991) assign gender merely on the basis of biological sex. They base their analysis on a comparison of the payment methods of female- versus male-headed households, where a household is defined as female headed only if she is not married. Although, not surprisingly, numerous differences between male- and female-headed households are reported, alleged gender differences are confounded by marital status. Researchers interested in gender differences may wish to read more widely in the feminist literature on women's experience to help select more applicable theories.

Poststructuralist Feminism. Poststructural feminist perspectives regarding gender are the most radical. They stress that signifiers (e.g., words like "masculine" and "feminine") associated with sex and gender are coupled with many phenomena not necessarily linked to sex or gender (e.g., activities like managing and shopping) and that cultural notions regarding sex and gender thus tend to inform our understanding of these phenomena. Theories centrally related to our view of consumers, such as the marketing concept, can be argued to be partially reliant on gendered signifiers for their meaning because the taken-for-granted linguistic opposition between marketer and consumer is related to our culture's binary

oppositions of male versus female and masculine versus feminine. "Marketer" is associated with masculinity and "consumer" with femininity since this dichotomy corresponds directly to practices in place when modern marketing arose: men were more likely to be managers or those who controlled the public world of commerce and woman were likely to be consumers or those who controlled the private world of consumption (Firat 1991; Firat and Venkatesh, forthcoming). This historical interplay between the development of the definition of "feminine" and the development of consumer culture would be hard to overestimate. Numerous scholars have noted that consumption-related duties became "woman's chores" in the latter part of the last century and that, at the same time, these duties became one of the major activities occupying the time of middle-class women (Benson 1986; Ewen 1977; Firat and Venkatesh, forthcoming; Gordon and McArthur 1984; Leach 1981). Today, the image of many consumption activities as "women's work" and the tendency for women to define themselves in part through their consumer behaviors persists (Fischer and Arnold 1990; Fischer and Gainer 1991; Jansen-Verbeke 1987). Noting these associations raises questions concerning what kinds of gendered assumptions might underlie the way the marketer/consumer relationship is construed in our theories.

Links between gender imagery and marketer/consumer relationships can be traced to some of the earliest marketing texts (such as Naether's [1928] *Advertising to Women* and Frederick's [1929] *Selling Mrs. Consumer*), which explicitly cast the consumer as female and pit the marketing manager (referred to with masculine pronouns) against the consumer, advising him on how to get her to buy something she might not otherwise have purchased. The contemporary marketing concept (i.e., that "the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target markets and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors" [Kotler and Turner 1989, p. 17]) belies a lingering connection between masculine/feminine relationships and marketer/consumer relationships: a poststructural feminist reading of the language in which the concept is couched points up the sexual connotations of the statement that marketers are seeking to "determine consumers' wants and needs" (which can be read either as "discovering" or, more perniciously, as "dictating" needs, that is, deciding for consumers what those consumers *really* want) and "delivering desired satisfactions" (giving them what they are asking for) to achieve their own goals (get what the marketer wants). This reading has striking parallels to stereotypes of exploitive male/female relationships in which a man decides what a woman really wants and "delivers satisfaction," thereby achieving his own sexual gratification.

Clearly, there are many female marketing managers and even more male consumers; equally clearly, marketers cannot universally be characterized as exploitively seeking to violate consumers interests. Nonetheless, there are persistent tendencies to characterize consumers (male and female) in terms consistent with stereotypes of women (as passive entities, easily duped by a superficial show of interest, and essentially powerless) and to construe marketers in relation to consumers in terms consistent with stereotypes of men (as self-serving agents, less concerned with permanent relationships than with immediate gratification, and as aggressors). Such a gendered marketer/consumer dichotomy is evident, for example, in the portrayal of consumers as struggling to maintain self-control over their desires for immediate gratification in the face of numerous actions taken by marketers to exploit consumer impatience (Hoch and Loewenstein 1991). In another example, as described in consumer research (e.g., Frenzen and Davis 1990), direct sellers appear to be clever exploiters of consumers' needs for social relationships to achieve their own ends. That consumers might resist excessive pressure or even "use" marketing venues to their own purposes (without buying products) is never intimated even though there is evidence that women are not as susceptible to marketing pressures as is sometimes hypothesized (Frenzen and Davis 1990).

The point here is that the discourse of consumer research constrains our perception of marketer/consumer relationships. It is not accurate to characterize consumers as largely passive dupes, and marketers are not necessarily scheming aggressors. Envisioning other constructions of reality that place more emphasis on the trust and respect that can characterize relationships may help develop more mutually beneficial consumer/marketer relationships. A starting point for consumer researchers would be to devote greater attention to exchange relationships in which the power is more balanced between consumer and marketer (such as garage sales; see Soiffer and Herrmann [1987]). It is worth noting that more nearly balanced power differentials between buyer and seller are a feature of business-to-business marketing, and that industrial marketers have introduced the concept of "relationship marketing," which speaks to the need for trust, mutual respect, and a long-term orientation in buyer-seller relationships (see Jackson 1985).

Methods of Data Collection

A key component in scholarly training is learning the data collection methods that are consistent with the discipline's aims and theories (Laudan 1983). Proper and standard procedures are emphasized. However, rigorous adherence to such standards may both fail to ensure objectivity and introduce systematic gender bias in the name of proper method (Harding 1986). Since liberal feminism accepts traditional scientific method as fundamentally sound, it merely exhorts scientists to follow established research norms more closely. Both

women's voice/experience feminism and poststructuralist feminism hold important insights into gendered aspects of data collection.

Women's Voice/Experience Feminism. Women's voice/experience feminism points to several opportunities to sensitize us to gender issues in the data collection process. One opportunity involves a heightened awareness of the various ways in which sex and gender may affect data collection. For example, Rao and Steckel (1991) asked respondents to rate marketing faculty candidates individually and then to reach a group consensus. The sex of respondents and candidates was not taken into consideration. Since research employing scenarios that systematically vary the sex of the main character find that respondent judgments are affected both by the sex of the respondent and by that of the main character (see Simeone 1987), including sex might have led to insights about potential two- and three-way interactions involving respondent sex, candidate sex, and judgments on other reported characteristics such as personality and collegiality. As a second example, since an all-male research team was used to interview married women (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1990), it might have been useful for them to speculate how their posing of questions about experiences unique to women affected their data collection (Harding 1987; Oakley 1981) and/or to consider using mixed-sex research teams sensitized to gender issues in the future (Costa 1991; Young 1991). As a final example, Pechmann and Ratneshwar (1991, p. 149) asked respondents to view an ad for a powdered cleanser as they "normally" would and to rate attributes. Since many view cleansers as a "woman's product," men's viewing habits, knowledge, and experience may be quite limited. These examples show not a violation of some ideal design but rather that sex and gender may have unavoidable effects. To better understand these effects, reporting sample sex composition and testing for response homogeneity across sex should be routine. Further, including gender-related measures such as gender identity and gender-role attitudes might lead to important new insights about consumption processes.

A second opportunity for sensitivity relates to gaining a better understanding of the nature of the researcher/respondent relationship. Women's voice/experience feminism challenges the assumption that the researcher/respondent relationship can ever be nonreflexive, that is, independent and separate (Belk 1991; Oakley 1981), or that the relationship is either gender neutral or gender inclusive (Eichler 1988; Sherif 1979). For example, the goal of nonreflexivity is thought to be achieved by maintaining the hierarchy and distance between the interviewee and interviewer by shrugging or laughing off interviewee questions, and not revealing information lest it affect responses (see Selltiz et al. 1965). When Oakley (1981) interviewed women about their childbearing experiences, her initial attempt to follow such textbook interviewing prescriptions created a dilemma for her. If she refused to answer such questions as "Which hole does the baby come out of?" hierarchy and distance would have been maintained. However, it also would have negatively affected respondents' willingness to provide data. By using her research as a vehicle to offer information and advice to her respondents (she had recently had a child herself and so was able to give them information they were uncomfortable requesting from their male doctors) she was able to use her gendered and reflexive relationship with her respondents to mutual advantage. She obtained insights into their experience; they benefited from advice based on hers. Acknowledging the gendered, reflexive nature of the researcher/respondent relationship has several research implications. First, it validates emergent subjective experiences as a basis of knowledge (Oakley 1981; Smith 1974; Westkott 1979) and thus can lead to new insights into women's unique experiences (e.g., Thompson et al. 1990). Second, it rejects the traditional hierarchical assumption that the scholar speaks as the voice of authority, suggesting instead a more collaborative relationship between the "narrator" and "interpreter" (Personal Narratives Group 1989b) in which, for example, the respondents participate in the interpretation process (e.g., Thompson et al. 1990). Third, it suggests that scholars must acknowledge how their own class, gender, culture, and race affect interpretation (Harding 1987; Personal Narratives Group 1989b). For example, since Thompson et al.'s (1990) interpretations of married women's experiences were unavoidably influenced by the researchers' respective backgrounds, acknowledging them and their likely influence would provide an interpretive context for interested readers.

The recent trend toward more qualitative consumer research suggests that gender issues may receive more attention since qualitative researchers are more likely to seek a fully contextualized understanding of phenomena (Belk 1991) and to report respondents' sex, gender, race, and age (see, e.g., Mehta and Belk 1991; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Although such methods are well suited to the exploration of women's perspectives, they have no inherent immunity to gender problems and require continued sensitivity to gender (see Warren 1988). Scholars may wish to consult feminist sources such as *Interpreting Women's Lives,* edited by the Personal Narratives Group (1989a, 1989b), for research that is exemplary in this regard.

Poststructuralist Feminism. Poststructuralist feminism, with its attention to discourse, suggests somewhat different sources of bias in our methods of data collection. One source arises because wording may invoke certain unintended implicit meanings and elicit reactions that do not accord with intended meanings. Eichler (1988), for instance, points out that just as the pronoun "you" can be interpreted either as singular (i.e., you, yourself) or plural (i.e., you, everyone else in some

category), the pronoun "he" can be interpreted in either the gender inclusive or the gender exclusive sense. She also notes that responses to gendered language may vary depending on the respondent's sex, as well as the respondent's interpretation of whether the question was gender inclusive or particular to men. Numerous analyses of gendered terminology in language (e.g., Moulton 1977) have shown that the use of terms such as he, his, man, and so forth, are never neutral, regardless of intention. Even when the term is unambiguously inclusive, the result may be odd, amusing or insulting (e.g., "Some men are female"; Moulton 1977).

Despite widespread adoption of gender inclusive language in consumer research articles and textbooks, insensitivities to the effects of gendered language persist in data collection. Although question wording is of paramount importance and books on research methods usually contain detailed discussions on the subject in general, gender issues are overlooked. For example, Sudman and Bradburn's (1982, p. 1) highly regarded book on questionnaire design opens with a discussion of the critical importance of question wording in maximizing validity and a warning that "seemingly small changes can cause large differences in responses." The fact that they ignore the issue of gendered language is an indication of the extent to which unquestioned assumptions about gender neutral language pervade our discourse.

In practice, the ambiguous use of "he" is not uncommon in consumer research instruments. For instance, Wilson and Peterson (1989, p. 24) presented respondents with the following scenario in a word-of-mouth study: "Suppose you found out your neighbor had purchased Brand [A or B] (of a digital tape recorder) and that he had to take it back." It is unclear as to whether "he" was intended to mean male or any human. Yet responses are likely to have varied depending on how this was interpreted, as well as on respondents' sex and gender. We suggest that, because of the product involved, it is more likely that respondents would have interpreted the neighbor as male. This is theoretically problematic given that nowhere in the article is it suggested that the research question is about the evaluation of positive versus negative word-of-mouth information from *male* sources.

As another example, the Wallach and Kogan (1964) scale of risk-taking behavior has been used a number of times in consumer research. In the 12 scenarios used to create an index of risk-taking behavior, there is only one female mentioned, a "girl," Miss X whom Mr. Y is considering marrying. Not only are all the actors male; the contexts and decision situations are all traditionally associated with men (e.g., electrical engineering, war, and football). Given its age, it is to be expected that some biases would appear in the scale; the issue is how it has been applied and/or tailored to contemporary research contexts. For example, when Zinkhan and Kirande (1991) used the Wallach and Kogan scale in a cross-cultural study, they eliminated the football scenario as inappropriate for Spanish subjects, but the asymmetrical gender content of the scale was overlooked. Undoubtedly, women and traditional female activities were not consciously excluded from the scale; gender simply remains an unmarked category in our discourses. Interestingly, in their analyses, these authors discovered significant differences between male and female responses. Their results lend credence to the critiques raised by women's voice/experience and poststructuralist feminism and suggest that greater efforts to be sensitive to gender in language are imperative.

Methods of Data Analysis

One of the final steps in the knowledge-generation process is the analysis and interpretation of data. Since data analysis decisions are largely influenced by decisions about problematics, theory, and data collection methods, the possibilities for gender biases before this step are numerous. Those who would argue that analyses, at least quantitative ones, are fairly mechanical might regard this phase as the least susceptible to introducing gendered assumptions. Two of the feminist perspectives give insight, however, as to how gender biases can be incorporated into analyses.

Women's Voice/Experience Feminism. The feminism of women's voice/experience would suggest it is necessary to at least consider the possibility of sex- and gender-based differences in the phenomenon of interest. If, as argued in the previous section, too few consumer researchers report sample sex and gender characteristics, fewer yet report analyses involving these characteristics, thus ensuring that nothing will be learned about the influence of these characteristics on consumption. This omission is especially true for quantitative analyses, but, even in qualitative analyses that tend to report respondent sex, the opportunity to incorporate it into analysis is not always taken. For instance, Schouten's (1991) analysis overlooked systematic differences in men's and women's self-concepts and motivations for self-alteration through plastic surgery. There are profound implications that could be drawn from an interpretation of the fact that the two men had pragmatic reasons for self-alteration (e.g., sinus problems), while the seven women (or their relatives) were dissatisfied with their bodies (e.g., breasts too big, too small). As Wolf (1990) points out, pressures to achieve ideal beauty lead women to experience intense dissatisfaction with their natural appearance and to exert heroic efforts to conform to socially defined standards of beauty.

Even if the relatively easy step of comparing the sexes becomes routine, problems may persist since this approach is underwritten by the view that all differences are biologically based. Those who view gender as socially constructed and variable within as well as between the sexes would argue that this is insufficient, if not misleading. They would suggest that, if a quantitative

approach to data analysis is to be used, then quantitative measures of gender-related constructs must also be developed and their impact analyzed in order to fully understand any phenomenon of interest. Similarly, qualitative approaches must also be more sensitive to the influence of gender on consumption. Simply put, sex or gender differences cannot be presumed not to exist if no attempt is made to analyze data to detect their presence. As argued at the beginning of this article, gender is a pervasive filter through which individuals experience their social world. Since consumption is a ubiquitous cultural phenomena, much remains to be analyzed about gendered aspects of consumption.

Poststructuralist Feminism. Poststructuralist feminism offers a somewhat different critique of data analysis, leveled at the dominant discourses and practices within science and scholarly journals. The practice of hypothesis testing, and the dominant discourse in which it is embedded, may introduce a tendency in studies of sex or gender to find differences where few or none exist. The standard hypothesis-testing format is for H_0 to hypothesize no sex/gender difference, and for H_A to hypothesize a sex/gender difference. Despite extensive criticisms of the ingrained prejudice against publishing findings supporting the null hypothesis (Greenwald 1975), journals still display a bias toward publishing significant results (Eichler 1988; Hyde 1981). This practice must lead to careful reading of studies reporting significant results because they can support unfounded gender assumptions in several ways. First, they can create the impression that differences are more numerous than nondifferences, when in fact many "no difference" studies may be stored in file cabinets or omitted from the research report. Further, when differences are reported, the discussion is often framed so that the male results are described as the norm while the female results are described as deviations from the norm, thereby implying not only that females are different but also that they are inferior (Spender 1981). Second, through lack of a priori conceptual development and/or post hoc discussion about gender, reported gender differences (e.g., Meyers-Levy 1988, 1989; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991) can appear to be biologically "hard-wired" and thus reinforce cultural stereotypes about men's and women's inherent abilities. Third, even if statistically significant, the differences may be too small to be substantively significant (Hyde 1981). Hyde meta-analyzed the data from which Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) concluded that four cognitive gender differences (in verbal, quantitative, visual-spatial, and visual-analytic spatial abilities) were "well established." She found effect sizes to be small, accounting for only 1–5 percent of the population variance and thus not meaningful in a practical setting. Yet publishing results reporting significant differences confers a legitimacy and credibility that can form the basis of self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, telling people that scientists have found sex differences in some domains may promote the enactment of these differences.

Only by critical examination of our data analysis techniques and publication strategies can practices biased in these ways be eliminated. In papers that argue that empirical gender-based differences exist (e.g., Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991), journal reviewers might press authors to articulate fully the nature and implications of the theoretical bases (as well as empirical precedents) in which they have grounded their investigations. This would help to ensure that discussions distinguish carefully whether biologically based sex differences or sociologically based gender differences are being posited and to delimit the applicability of the study in terms of the contexts in which it is thought to be relevant.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This critical discussion of consumer research in light of feminist theories has identified many ways in which unwarranted assumptions are embedded in and perpetuated by our practices. First, feminist perspectives were shown to reveal androcentrism in traditional definitions of objectivity and to add to the debate on the feasibility and the desirability for consumer research of pursuing objectivity as it is traditionally defined. Second, problematics reflective of the interests and experiences of women were argued to have been largely ignored in mainstream consumer research. The dominance of patriarchal interests and perspectives in existing problematics was also addressed. Third, feminist challenges to certain theories used in consumer research were raised. Undefended assumptions of biologically determined sex differences, unacknowledged assumptions of asymmetry in the socialization of men and women, failures to take gender into account when relevant, and lack of awareness of the way gendered signifiers inform theoretical discourses were all discussed. Fourth, feminist insights about the need to take sex of respondents and researchers into account in both qualitative and quantitative data collection, and to be sensitive to the effects of gendered language during data collection, were reviewed. Finally, feminist critiques both of failures to take into account the sex and/or gender socialization of respondents and of tendencies to reify sex differences in data analysis were discussed.

There are several reasons for optimism concerning the discipline's ability to reduce sex/gender biases and thereby develop more accurate and useful knowledge. For example, the 1991 ACR-sponsored conference on sex and gender and consumer research in Salt Lake City, and the increasing number of ACR papers and special sessions exploring sex- and gender-related topics, suggests that such issues are increasingly salient and important to consumer researchers. Also, the openness to qualitative and interpretive research methods that are consistent with some feminist theory has been dem-

onstrated in the increasing amount of such work published in *JCR*.

In the long term, consumer research has the potential to become a discipline with a heightened sensitivity not only to sex and gender but also to issues such as race, class, culture, and sexual orientation. To develop in this way, the field must support a plurality of theoretical and methodological approaches capable of capturing rich and complex consumption phenomena, as well as engage in ongoing and critical self-reflection.

Research that incorporates the following can help achieve these goals:

- Problematics that reflect the perspectives and concerns of those groups that have been systematically marginalized
- Theories and concepts that are inclusive of marginalized groups, or that explicitly delimit the domain of their applicability
- Data collection methods that recognize emergent subjective experiences of women and minority groups as epistemologically valid, and instruments that are sensitive to the effects of gendered, or otherwise biased, language
- Data analysis methods that do not assume a priori that there are, or that there are not, differences related to sex, gender, or other biological, social, or cultural categories, but that facilitate examining their presence and their nature

Whether our goals are merely to improve on our current practices or, more ambitiously, to broaden and enrich our discipline, the ideas expressed here should prove invaluable. That such an effort is worthwhile seems incontrovertible.

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